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DEPT FOR AF/SPG, AF/RSA, DRL, AND DRL/IRF  
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SUBJECT: Presidency Appoints Chair of Commission on Rights of  
Non-Muslims in National Capital

Ref: 06 Khartoum 00774

¶1. (U) On February 8, President al-Bashir issued a presidential decree, with the approval of First Vice President Salva Kiir, appointing Joshua Dao as Chair of the Commission on the Rights of Non-Muslims in the National Capital. The membership of the Commission will be announced later by the Presidency.

¶2. (U) The Commission - called for by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and enshrined in the Interim National Constitution - was appointed by the Presidency to ensure that the rights of non-Muslims in Khartoum are protected, and not adversely affected by the application of Sharia law in the capital. (Note: This recalls the rancor over the Khartoum State constitution - see reftel - that arose early in 2006 when the SPLM and NCP disagreed over the status of Khartoum as a national capital or a northern state. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) Comment: Dao is a veteran politician from Southern Sudan, and was formerly a member of a minority, pro-National Congress Party, the Union of Sudan African Parties (USAP). His appointment, and the anticipated operation of the Commission, marks an important step in the implementation of the CPA and in further guaranteeing religious freedom in Khartoum. This commission was a key negotiating point for the SPLM during the lengthy North-South peace talks; it addresses the need for cultural space for the millions of transplanted Southerners living in the great Khartoum area.

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